

The Five
Negro Presidents
U. S. A.



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THE FIVE NEGRO PRESIDENTS

ACCORDING TO WHAT WHITE PEOPLE SAID THEY WERE

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by

J. A. ROGERS

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(On cover — President Harding and his paternal grand-uncle, Oliver Harding. Abbott's Monthly, Sept. 1932).

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In 1963 when Attorney-General Kennedy and Senator Javits said there might be a Negro President in the next thirty or forty years, FACT, most outspoken of the big magazines, replied there was already one and in its January - February, 1964 issue had an article "America's First Negro President." It named Warren G. Harding as the one and had affidavits from elderly whites who knew the Harding family.

But before Harding three other Presidents had been loudly proclaimed by white people as being of Negro ancestry Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln.

The portraits of none of the above-mentioned show the slightest degree of Negro strain. But that is certainly not proof. Even before the Revolution many of Negro ancestry had become so white that whites who had been kidnapped and sold as Negroes could not prove they were really white, the more so that some of them were darker than the bleached Negroes.

Children were especial victims. As late as 1858, white orphan asylums sold their children at public auctions and a picture of the times shows a white child been tanned to sell him into slavery in the South. Harper's Weekly, January 30, 1864, has pictures of emancipated white slaves.

The most famous case of the times was that of Salome Mueller, a white German girl, who was sold as a Negro slave. Her relatives brought suit but the Supreme Court of Louisiana held she was a Negro. It wasn't until her birth certificate was dug up in Germany that her real "race" was discovered. In fact, Salome who had been married to a Negro, believed herself to be one also. What writers of the time said of this is given in my "Sex and Race," Volume Two, in the chapter, "White People Sold as Negro Slaves."

Even some aristocrats were of Negro ancestry. George Washington tells of Colonel Catesby Cocke, Virginia Senator, whose Negroid features made him hurry away nervously from Washington's home when he saw there an old Negro to whom he bore a striking resemblance. Therefore when the political opponents of a Presidential candidate said he was a Negro many accepted it without question.

It is usual for white writers to condemn offhand the statement that any President could possibly have any degree of Negro strain, whatsoever. But it is not possible, without minute tracing of ancestry, to find whether one is "pure" white.

Here's the case of one who started as a Negro, became white, and then voluntarily became a Negro again. He is T. John McKee, whose case attracted national attention and whose picture appeared on the front page of the New York Daily News, February 20, 1948.

McKee, grandson of a Negro millionaire of that name, had crossed the color-line, gone to Yale and studied law. "He lived for forty-five years as a white man and has been a successful Wall Street lawyer," said the News. He had also married a white woman and had children by her.

Then in 1948 he saw an ad issued by an orphan society of Philadelphia for any living grandsons of McKee. The latter, in his will, had left \$800,000 to found a Military School for White and Negro Orphans with the provision that if this was not done the money with interest should go to his last living grandson.

This Attorney McKee discovered was no other than himself and he promptly became a Negro again to the tune of \$1,240,000 with interest on the original sum.

Here's another case, this time from English royalty.

David Michael, Marquis of Milford Haven, cousin of the Queen of England, has some Negro strain but positively does not show it. On the paternal side he is descended from Queen Victoria; on the maternal from Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet. Pushkin in turn is descended from Abram Petrovitch Hannibal, an unmixed Sudanese Negro, who had been adopted by Peter the Great of Russia, and of whom Pushkin wrote in his "Negro of Peter the Great." Hannibal's descendants married also into the German, Russian, Dutch and other royal families. David Michael's mother was Nadjeda, daughter of Grand Duke Michael of Russia.

In some Southern states this member of English royalty would be a Negro. Virginia law provides that if any Negro ancestry is "ascertainable" one is a Negro. If this had been proved of Thomas Jefferson, also, he would be one.

When this descendant of Victoria and of Pushkin married the Hearst newspapers had a feature on it saying that a coal-black baby might yet be born in the English royal family. This was based on the belief that if either couple has the slightest degree of Negro strain a coal-black child might be born. (Debrett's Peerage, p. 53; Burke's Peerage, p. 1668).

Therefore if Negro strain can be found in European royalty, which is so exclusive, why not in the American colonies, where there was so much intermixing. Winston Churchill's grandmother was one-fourth American Indian which William Joyce, rightly or wrongly, claims wasn't Indian but Negro.

That, therefore, these American Presidents might have had some Negro strain is possible. Did some persons who knew the intimate details of their ancestry tell of them? There are very many instances of whites being exposed as Negroes. Interracial intercourse was very

common then. George Washington had a Negro son and Jefferson mulatto daughters. Negro males were also named as co-respondents in white divorce cases as Helen Catterall tells in her "Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery And The Negro."

Mixed marriages were also legal in several Southern states, including Virginia and Mississippi. In Tennessee mixed couples had to pay a tax.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

The chief attack on Jefferson was in "The Johnny-Cake Papers." In a general denunciation of him it said, "Tom Jefferson, son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father." It also called him "a half-nigger."

Opposition papers took it up. It is difficult to find matter with specific details of the assertion now. (Albert J. Nock's "Jefferson" p. 233, 1926. Taylor & Middleton's "The Eagle Screams" pp. 67, 77, 1936; David C. Coyle's "Ordeal of the Presidency, p. 29, 1960; and David S. Broder, New York Times Magazine, Sept. 9, 1964.

ANDREW JACKSON

Andrew Jackson's father and mother came from Ireland and were wretchedly poor. The Virginia Magazine of History. Vol. 29, p. 191, says that Jackson was the son of a white woman who had "intermarried with a Negro and that his eldest brother had been sold as a slave in Carolina." What gave an air of truth to this was that the elder Jackson died before Andrew was born. His widow went to live on the Crawford farm where there were Negro slaves and that one of these was Andrew's father. It was stressed that Andrew was conceived after the death of his supposed father, whose name he bore.

Other mention can be found in David C. Doyle's "Ordeal of the Presidency," p. 127, 1960; Jacobson, D. "Affairs of Dame Rumor," p. 190, 1943.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Cartoon of 1860. Original source not known now.
Appears in David Browder's "Ordeal of the Presidency."

Note his wooly hair.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Lincoln was said to be the illegitimate son of a Negro by Nancy Hanks. In his campaign for the Presidency he was often referred to as a Negro by his opponents. He was even depicted as a Negro. He was called Abraham Africanus the First.

What gave strength to this was that his hair was more Negroid than Caucasian. So was his color. Of his father, he said, "His face was round, his complexion swarthy, hair, black and coarse, eyes brown." Of himself, "Of dark complexion with coarse black hair and dark eyes." Herndon, his closest friend and law partner said he had "very dark skin."

His confidential servant, William Slade, an ex-slave and a Negro, was much fairer and had straight hair. Slade looked like a white man. Herndon said, "There was something about his (Lincoln's) origin, he never cared to dwell on." Other writers agree with him. Coleman says, "All we know about President Lincoln's parentage and birth under his own hand are two brief records one an entry in the Bible in his own handwriting that he was born on February 12, 1809 and the other, a brief autobiography which he gave Mr. Jesse R. Fell in December, 1859 for a campaign sketch."

Lincoln had a secret preying on his mind. Was it his race? His enemies harped on it. Herndon says of it, "Lincoln often thought of committing suicide. Why? Did the knowledge of his mother's origin or his own press the thought of suicide upon him?" (The Hidden Lincoln, p. 412, 1938).

Jacobson mentions a "Catechism" by a "western author adducing evidence" that Lincoln was of Negro ancestry. He also mentions another "Catechism" by Chauncey Burr, who said, "It would not rebound to Lincoln's honor to have it proved that he is part Negro.

For then on the ground of a natural sympathy with his own race we might find excuses for facts which we could never pardon a white man." (Coleman, Wm. "The Evidence that Abraham Lincoln was not Born in Lawful Wedlock," 1899). Beveridge, A. J. *Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 1 p. 4, 1928; *Lincoln Encyclopedia*, p. 190, 1950; C. Jacobson, *D. Affairs of Dame Rumor*, p. 191, 1948; D. C. Coyle's *Ordeal of the Presidency*, p. 155, 1960; Sandburgh, Carl, *The Prairie Years*, Vol. 2 p. 381, 1926; *American Mercury*, June, 1925. (The Many-Sired Lincoln); Taylor and Middleton's "The Eagle Screams," pp. 106, 109, 1936; Herndon, W. H. "Abraham Lincoln," Vol. 1, p. 1, 1896. It seems clear that those whites who said Lincoln was a Negro are right.

VICE PRESIDENT HAMLIN

Even more than Lincoln was his Vice-President, Hannibal Hamlin, said to be a Negro. While United States Senator from Maine, he was often attacked from the floor because of his dark skin. To one opponent, he replied. "I take my color from nature. You get yours from the brandy bottle. Which is more honorable."

He was a special target for the South during the 1860 campaign, the more so as he was more outspoken against slavery than Lincoln. Editorials thundered against him and "the dire effects of electing a free Negro to the Vice Presidency." R. B. Rhett, Secession leader of the (Charleston, S. C.) *Mercury* (July 9, 1860), said Hamlin "is what we call a mulatto. He has black blood in him. The Northern people elected that man in consequence of his peculiarity . . . They design to place over the South a man who has Negro blood." He wrote Lincoln that he understood that Lincoln had a mulatto boy "and if you will let us know what you'll take for the boy, Hannibal, and your price is reasonable we'll purchase him." The *Chicago Democrat*, June 4, 1861, said, "The constant theme in the South for the last two months has been the

election of the abolitionist Lincoln and the free Negro Hamlin."

As regards Hamlin's color, General Butler wrote the Secretary of War, Stanton, when he was gathering Negro troops for the Union Army that he would have a regiment of mulattoes, about the "complexion of Vice President Hamlin."

While the South was making much against Lincoln and Hamlin one of the South's generals, James B. Floyd, was being called a Negro in the North. Floyd had been governor of Virginia, a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, and a former Secretary of War. A United States publication, *Rebellion Record*, Vol. 3, p. 47, 1862, has the following story about Floyd from the *Springfield, Ill. Republican*, "A few years ago a gentleman residing in Richmond, Virginia, gave a large dinner to some distinguished men, among whom was Floyd, then a rising man but whose personal appearance indicated neither mental or physical superiority he being a pursy, dark complexion man with crispy hair. Among the guests were two Indian chiefs — magnificent specimens of their race. Floyd thinking to compliment them and make them at their ease told them in a condescending manner, that he could boast of Indian blood, being descended from Pocahontas. One of the chiefs drawing himself up majestically and disdainfully and with a look of contempt on his noble countenance said in broken English. Ugh! No! No! Nigur! Nigur! (Nigger! Nigger!). The confusion and dismay of Floyd was complete and it required all the boasted politeness of Richmond to keep the other guests from laughing aloud."

Mention of a Negro strain in Lincoln was revived most unexpectedly in 1940 when RKO, for the world premiere of the motion picture, "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" offered a prize for the American who most resemble Lincoln. The

winner was Thomas Bomar, a lawyer, and president of the National Postal Alliance.

When after submitting his picture he appeared in person, the judges were amazed. It was as if Lincoln, had come to life. But before the premiere, it was discovered that Bomar, who, to all appearances was white, was a Negro. He was given the prize and sat in the front row the opening night but nothing was said of the contest.

The dailies were silent about the affair but the Interstate Broadcasting Company of New York mentioned it January 27th, while the Negro press gave it wide publicity.

Friday, an outspoken white magazine, also gave it several pages with pictures. Under the heading, "Lincoln Snubbed at Lincoln Movie Show," it tells how the prize was "privately awarded to a Negro . . . the man who looked most like Lincoln." (March 15th, 1940. Also Rogers, J. A. Sex and Race, Vol. 2, p. 379. Bomar's picture.)

WARREN G. HARDING

Shortly before the 1920 election day Americans were amazed to read in the Democratic papers that Harding "was a Negro." Some time before that however, millions of mimeographed broadsides had been distributed saying that Harding's father is George Tryon Harding, obviously a mulatto; he has thick lips, rolling eyes chocolate skin, "and that his mother "Phobe Dickerson, a midwife" of whose ancestry little is known was white.

Attorney-General Harry Daugherty says that there was discovered in the San Francisco mails alone over 250,000 copies and that "President Wilson indignantly ordered the stuff destroyed." Thereafter they were distributed by hand.

With this also appeared a book by William Estabrook

Chancellor, Professor of Economics, Politics and Social Sciences of Wooster College, Ohio. Chancellor based his assertions on interviews with aged residents of Marion, Ohio, who knew the Harding family. He had affidavits from them as well as a letter from Senator Foraker, a friend of the Negro, who had written him asking him to give Harding's sister, Mrs. Votaw, employment in the public schools of Washington, D. C., of which Chancellor was then superintendent. She was given employment in a Negro school, then tightly segregated. She also lived among Negroes there.

Wendell P. Dabney, a Negro, editor of a weekly, and paymaster of the city of Cincinnati, said that Harding had been known as a Negro long before the circulars appeared and that when he was first running for office he used to tell Negroes he was colored. It is reported that when Republican leaders had called on Harding to deny the story, he said, "How should I know. One of my ancestors might have jumped the fence."

The Justice Department did its best to suppress the story. One of its special investigators, Gaston B. Means, tells how he bought up Chancellor's book on Harding, brought them to Washington in a guarded express car and "made a big bonfire" of them on the grounds of the Boyd mansion. The plates were also destroyed, he said. (*Strange Death of President Harding*, pp. 139-140).

So thorough was the suppression that the book "Warren G. Harding, President of the United States," is one of the rarest books ever printed in America. There are only three known copies. It is now said to be worth \$200,000 a copy. The rear book room of the New York Public Library has a copy.

FACT, January to February, 1964, reproduces copies of some of the sworn affidavits of aged whites who knew Harding's ancestors. It also says that inquiries made by

Dr. H. F. Alderfer and Samuel Hopkins Adams among the persons who swore to the affidavits showed that such persons still held to what they had said about Harding's being a Negro.

PRESIDENT . . .

The fifth President said to be of Negro ancestry will not be named here. There seems to be no published research on his ancestry as in the case of Harding. My first intimation of it was from a white woman in a cafe in the Latin Quarter of Paris where Americans met nightly to talk. I understood it had appeared in a French paper on the topic of race intermixture.

On my return to America I heard much of it in Washington and New York and was asked by my audiences if it was true. But the only published mention I ever saw of it was in the Baltimore Afro-American where one of its Negro columnists said it was a "smear."

So far as I know it was all based on a photograph of the President's mother and on certain of those of the President's. The portrait of his mother to those acquainted with Negroid physiognomy does show Negro ancestry. Almost everyone who sees it has without prompting or knowing who she is says she is "colored." All were amazed when they heard who she really is. She is Virginia born.

The features of this President also do show some Negroid strain in his more informal pictures, especially two in my possession. Some of his pictures bear a striking resemblance to two well-known Negroes. As for color photographs often are quite different from the real color of the subject.

In conclusion, the fact that these five Presidents could be Caucasian to some and Negro to others, but shows how ridiculous is this burning question of race.



ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Drawn from life by Peale

New York Public Library Collection

Hamilton was darker in color than the picture shows.

Note his wool-ish hair.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Another noted American whose ancestry has long been in dispute is Alexander Hamilton. Native Virgin Islanders have insisted that he was colored. White American authors deny it.

Among Virgin Islanders who say he was is Hubert Harrison, George Challenger, and Rev. Charles D. Martin. The latter says that his mother, Rachel Fawcett, was a mixed blood; that white women, as in the other



ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Caucasianized

New York Public Library Collection

West Indian colonies, were very rare, Nevis being especially so; that the first mothers of the colony were Negro slave women with the mulatto offspring of their white masters. As in the United States the white master had children with the mulatto women and that their offspring came to be listed as white, that is, they were known as white-by-law as in certain Southern states of America. John Fawcett, grandfather of Rachel, was listed in an early census as having four black females.

The surest proof that Hamilton was of Negro ancestry says Rev. Martin is that Hamilton's brother, James, same mother, same father, also migrated to the United States where he was treated as a Negro because of his color and hair. James who was a merchant, "was once refused a seat in a Broadway coach because of his dark complexion . . . and is suing the company for heavy damages," quotes Rev. Martin from a letter to the Times.

In his article, "Alexander Hamilton Had Negro Blood," he says the proof of this is not on the general belief that West Indians are of mixed blood, but in the statement" of eye-witnesses . . . who knew the boy before fame crowned the man."

Rev. Martin adds that Hamilton's father was invited to the United States but not his mother because "her presence would have ruined his prospects . . . She loved her son (Alexander) too much. The father, the failure, would have been accepted but the mother with the noble mind and the dark skin would create as much trouble as a colored delegate at a white convention . . . Her features were too pronounced. She was too typically Negro." (Beth-Tphillah, August 1916).

The Spokesman, January, 1925, insists that he was "of Negro extraction has never been successfully disputed. The statesman had Negro blood, his mother being a Negro woman."

Maurice Davie, professor of Sociology, at Yale University, says, "Among notable Americans the story persists that Alexander Hamilton, who was born on the island of Nevis was of Negro descent . . .

"Complete proof or disproof of this allegation is difficult since he was born out of wedlock. If Hamilton was not a Negro he certainly brought two Negro sons into the world. One married a very light-colored white; female and lived as white." (Negroes in America Society, p. 391, 1949).

Strongest in support of Hamilton as white was Gertrude Atherton, leading novelist. She had written two novels glorifying him: "The Hero and The Conqueror," both of which she claimed were his "true and romantic story."

Because of the insistent claim that he was a Negro she decided to go to Nevis to prove that both his parents were unmixed white. She said in the North American Review (Vol. 175, pp. 227-242, 1902). "I admire Booker T. Washington and I wish the colored race all the success that it deserves; but inherited instincts are strongest in us and both enthusiasm and imagination would shrivel were I obliged to accept as a fact that Hamilton had Negro blood in him . . . If Hamilton had colored blood he would have had several coal-black descendants before this; such being the freakish law of Nature."

She thinks the belief that Hamilton was a Negro, was because he was a West Indian and in the United States such are regarded as Negroes. Also that there might have been another Alexander Hamilton of slave birth on the island. Gertrude Atherton, herself, was said to be of Negro ancestry.

Mitchell Broadus, in his book on Hamilton, says that "the statement he had Negro blood was without foundation." Hamilton's papers were burnt after his death. It

is held that this was done in order to hide his alleged Negro strain.

The real truth of Hamilton's ancestry, I think, can be found in the earliest and least known portrait of him. In this he is seen with that kind of wool-ish hair common among light Ngeroes in the West Indies. There is also a certain fulness about the mouth that is somewhat Negroid. The Portrait is by Peale.

When taunted about his birth Hamilton replied, "My blood is as good as those who plume themselves on their ancestry." This is interpreted by some writers as reference to his alleged Negro strain.

Incidentally, another personage who was at first more important than Hamilton and even Washington, who was said to be of Negro ancestry was Colonel George William Fairfax, cousin of the great Lord Fairfax. Rupert Hughes says of him, "Fairfax was popularly said to be a Negro. He was born in the Bahamas and his mother was popularly said to have been a dusky beauty." Washington's brother, Lawrence, married Fairfax's sister. (*Life of George Washington*, Vol. 1, p. 183; Vol. 2, p. 21, 1926).

For extensive documentation and bibliography on the racial intermixture that has gone on in the United States, see my "Sex And Race," vol 2; and "Nature Knows No Color-Line." Also the "Pass For White" file in the West 135th Street Library, New York, N. Y.

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